

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-12

NEW YORK TIMES
7 October 1983

SYRIA IS REPORTED AWAITING MISSILE

U.S. Aide Says Moscow Plans to Put Mobile Weapon in Mideast for First Time

By BERNARD GWERTZMAN

The Soviet Union has begun making preparations to deploy a mobile missile in Syria that could reach targets in Lebanon, Israel and the American Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean, an official traveling with Secretary of State George P. Shultz said last night.

The official, speaking in New York, said American intelligence had detected signs that the Soviet Union is preparing to send the missile, known as the SS-21, to Syria for the first time. The missile, which can carry nuclear warheads or high explosives, has never been deployed outside the Warsaw Pact nations.

The official said, however, that there was no indication the Soviet Union would introduce nuclear weapons into Syria but rather would use conventional explosives on the missile, which has a range of around 75 miles.

According to a Pentagon report cited by The Associated Press, the SS-21 is designed to be carried on a six-wheeled transporter that doubles as a launcher. The report said the Soviet Union produced it to replace a less-accurate surface-to-surface Warsaw Pact missile known as the Frog 7.

Increase in Tension Sighted

Mr. Shultz's aide said the United States would be "gravely concerned" if the Soviet Union sent any nuclear weapons into the Middle East, even under the control of Soviet troops. He said that although there was no indication Moscow was planning to deploy nuclear warheads in that region, the addition of another advanced weapons system in Syria was likely to increase tensions.

The Syrians, who have backed the anti-Government forces in Lebanon, indicated concern last month over the shelling of their lines in Lebanon by United States Navy warships that are protecting the marines in Lebanon and the Lebanese Government troops.

An American official said the report suggested the Russians were seeking to demonstrate their reliability as an ally of Syria, which suffered heavily losses to Israel last year and which has to consider the possibility of a new Syrian-Israeli conflict over Lebanon as a possibility, given the proximity of each side's forces to the other in Lebanon.

Since the beginning of the year, the Soviet Union has deployed new, long-range anti-aircraft missiles in Syria and replaced the fighter planes and tanks that Syria lost in combat against Israel in Lebanon last year.

Consistently on Syria's Side

The Soviet Union has also supported Syria in its refusal to withdraw its troops from Lebanon and has consistently taken Syria's side in the dispute over the future of Lebanon.

The Syrians, with Soviet backing, have sought to undermine the Lebanese Government of President Amin Gemayel and have rejected the idea of United Nations observers to supervise the truce in Lebanon.

Earlier yesterday, however, a senior State Department official said there had been movement toward resolving the question of finding neutral observers to police the cease-fire in Lebanon.

In a briefing for reporters, the official also expressed satisfaction at the progress he said was being made toward convening a meeting of the leaders of the different political factions in Lebanon for establishing a national unity government under Mr. Gemayel.

"All these things are working along," he said, "so we're pleased about that."

Shultz Meets on Mideast

The briefing took place yesterday after Mr. Shultz had met at the United Nations Plaza Hotel with the Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal, and with Foreign Minister Marwan al-Kassem of Jordan to discuss the Middle East. They are in New York for the fall session of the United Nations General Assembly.

Last week, Mr. Shultz failed to persuade the Syrians to agree to a United Nations truce observer team, and the mood within the American party then was in sharp contradiction to the hopeful remarks expressed yesterday. The senior official declined persistent requests to provide details on the composition of the observers.

The cease-fire agreement called for neutral observers to police the truce, and the United States and other members of the Western forces in Lebanon originally suggested that the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, already in the Middle East, handle the observation work.

There have been reports from the Middle East that one approach under discussion, given Syria's objections to United Nations participation, is for forces already in Lebanon as part of another United Nations peacekeeping force be used to watch the cease-fire. Another possibility has been the introduction of individual troops from several neutral nations.

A Western official at the United Nations who is usually informed on such activities said he did not know what "movement" the senior American official was talking about. He said the only reports he had seen suggested a deadlock, but added, "Perhaps he knows something we don't know."

In another matter, the senior State Department official said there had been intelligence information about a buildup of Cuban troops in Angola. Other officials said 25,000 Cubans were now estimated to be in Angola, an increase from the 19,000 to 20,000 of a few months ago.

The increase, the official said, was a result of the increased military pressure on the Angolan Government from the rebels in the south, known by the acronym Unita, who have reported major gains in recent months.